

## How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor (LTEs) are a great way to use what is going on in the news to your advantage and gain visibility for your school or library and your participation in the Picturing America program. The letters section of the paper is often one of the most well read. LTEs are short statements and typically appear on or near the paper's own editorials. They can effectively relay your passion for Picturing America and the value it brings to your school or library and community.

Below is a step by step guide to writing a letter to the editor to help you achieve success.

**Step 1:** LTEs are a good way to demonstrate how your school or library is giving back to the community in an even bigger way than usual. When reading your daily or community newspaper, pay close attention to articles that may have either a direct or indirect tie to education or the humanities. Your letter should be timely. Ideally, it should be submitted within days of the article to which you are responding appearing in the paper.

**Step 2:** Draft your letter in response to the news story.

- Don't respond to a story with negative connotations.
- Check with the individual publication(s) in which you would like to have your letter appear for their specific guidance on submitting an LTE.
- Keep the letter short (no more than 250 words). Don't be surprised if the paper shortens it further due to space constraints.
- Reference the date and headline of the article to which you are responding in your letter.
- Write as if you are talking directly to the editor of the paper, not to readers or to the world at large.
- Focus on just the part of the story that relates to the Picturing America program. It is important that your letter focus on one particular point and not try to cover or respond to everything discussed in a story.

**Step 3:** Consider from whom your letter should come. A typical rule of thumb is to go for the most influential and senior title within your organization that you can secure, or someone who was instrumental in securing the grant. Whether it's the principal, library director, or the teacher or librarian who uses the materials, make sure whoever signs it is excited about the program and what it means for your students and/ or patrons.

**Step 4:** Find the proper contact at the publication for your letter.

- You can normally find the contact on the publication's Web site or by simply calling its editorial department.
- Write a short E-mail introducing yourself and the letter that you will be submitting before sending it. In it:
  1. Make certain to include any relevant but brief biographical material about the person signing the letter - that expresses why they are an appropriate person to write the letter.
  2. Include contact information in case the publication, or a reader, would like to get in touch with your school or library.

**Step 5:** Check the newspaper in the days following your submission to see if your letter has been published. The editor is not obliged to print letters, so do not be upset if your piece is not published. You can always send it to a different publication.